

## STARK STATEMENT ON RES. 30: AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION TO GUARANTEE A RIGHT TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Tuesday, 01 March 2005

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### STARK STATEMENT INTRODUCING H.J. RES. 30: AMENDING THE U.S. CONSTITUTION TO GUARANTEE A RIGHT TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Wednesday, March 2, 2005

Mr. Speaker,

I  
am pleased to join my colleague, Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., to  
introduce an amendment to the US Constitution to guarantee health care  
as a right in this nation.

The  
current state of our health care system, if you want to call it a  
&ldquo;system,&rdquo; is bleak. Yet, Congress and the White House continue to  
ignore the problems we face, or worse yet, offer ideological solutions  
that only exacerbate our current ills. Making changes to the tax code  
will do nothing to extend high-quality health care to the millions who  
are left outside of the system today. I am frustrated, as many  
Americans are, with the lack of leadership on this issue. This is why  
I have come back to an idea I had more than a decade ago &ndash; to force  
Congress to provide health care of equal high quality for all by  
guaranteeing this right in our Constitution.

The  
problems we see today are the same that have been with us for the past

century. While some claim that the US has the best health care system in the world, the high-tech medical technologies that are available to some in this country are out of reach to the 45 million uninsured — including eight million children — and millions more who are underinsured and cannot afford this care. Even when people do have health insurance, bare-bones policies with high out-of-pocket costs help force millions of families into bankruptcy each year. Access to “the best medical care in the world” shouldn’t be determined by your income tax bracket.

And for

all the praise of the advanced medical technologies available in this country, high-tech does not necessarily equate to high quality.

Although the US spends far more than any other nation on medical care, we do not have the best health status. Studies have shown that overall Americans receive the recommended treatment only 50 percent of the time.

Inequities

in our system are not only based on what people can afford or where they live. Perhaps the most disturbing finding in recent years is the disparities in access, treatment, and outcomes that exist for people of color. It is unconscionable that the quality of health care may be determined by skin color, rather than need or proven medical practice.

An

individual’s health is the key to their ability to achieve the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that this nation was founded on. To ensure these rights are conferred, we must be certain that everyone — regardless of their income, race, education, or job status — can access health care of equal, high quality. Today, only prisoners in the US enjoy this right.

Other

countries — both developed and undeveloped — recognize the importance of health care and have guaranteed the right to health care through their constitutions, including Afghanistan, the European Union, Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Somali, and South Africa. Even the provisional constitution of Iraq — written in part by the current Bush Administration — guarantees health care as a right. It is shameful that the US, the shining example of prosperity and democracy throughout the world, still leaves so many people on their own when it comes to health care.

For more than 30

years I have served in this body as an advocate for health care for all people. Unfortunately, time and time again I have seen efforts to expand and improve access to health care squashed under the weight of special interests protecting their individual fiefdoms. I firmly believe that until all people have an equal right to high-quality health care guaranteed through the Constitution, their interests will

continue to be ignored as those who profit off the existing system maintain their opposition to reform. It's time for a grassroots movement to put the interests of the people first! I look forward to working with the advocacy community to make the shared vision of quality health care for all a reality.

On

a final note, I am introducing this amendment today to extend a specific right to all people, which is the purpose of such amendments. Unfortunately, this Congress is likely to consider other amendments to our Constitution that will remove rights and codify discrimination against certain groups of people. Our nation's most sacred document must never be amended to set aside certain rights for select groups, while barring others from ever realizing these rights. I can only hope that my colleagues take their responsibility to protect equal rights for all people in our democracy as seriously as I do.